

Dear Harold,

I'm so sorry to have let you down on the question of Finck's recollection of the autopsy photos. I miss things sometimes in my chaotic life. Hal Verb gave me a deserved slapping around about it.

It was not that Finck saw images that later were not in the inventory. ~~4~~ Finck unequivocally and repeatedly stated, even under oath, he'd directed the autopsy photographer, who he did not name, to take images that he later never saw. The implication was that the inventory was incomplete. (I am sympathetic that there may also have been tampering, but I cannot prove it, nor will I publicly insist that there definitely was tampering with the images we have.)

I wrote up the question of the problem with the photos in relation to the JAMA JFK articles. It is way too brief to be comprehensive, of course, but to show JAMA's shoddiness, I hoped it would do. My comments follow this and please feel free to use them any way you wish.

PROSECTORS DISPELL MYTH THAT NO PHOTOS WERE ALLOWED

Breo claimed that Humes dispelled the myth that no photos were allowed during the autopsy. (Breo DL. JAMA. 267:2797) Here Breo revealed an unexpected ignorance of the subject, and he incontestably proved his peer reviewers' unfamiliarity with the evidence. Anyone even vaguely familiar with the assassination literature knows photographs were taken of the autopsy. Copies of the autopsy photographs are available to anyone entering a decent sized bookstore, for several books explore the autopsy photographic record as a major thesis, including two written by author Harrison Livingstone. (Livingstone, ironically, was the only critic of the Warren Commission invited to the the AMA's May 19,1992 news conference on JFK.) The issue is not whether photographs were taken but whether the currently available images are the original, untampered and complete photographic record. As eyewitness, Fuad Bashour, MD, Parkland cardiologist exclaimed when shown a photograph of the rear of JFK's skull showing intact scalp behind the right ear (F-3), "Why do they cover it up?...This is not the way it was!" (Grodan R, Livingston, H. High Treason. 1989 New York, Berkeley Books, p.45) Humes himself, as readers of the last chapter realize, strongly disputed the HSCA's photographic interpretation that there was an entrance wound high in the rear of JFK's skull, which the HSCA believed was visible on the same image Bashour rejected.

When told by the HSCA that the image of the rear of the skull revealed a bullet entrance wound near the top of the skull, Humes countered, "...I can assure you that as we reflected the scalp to get to this point (the HSCA-determined entrance wound near the top of the skull) there was no defect corresponding to this in the skull at any point. I don't know what that is. It could be to me clotted blood. I don't, I just don't know what it is, but it certainly was not any wound of entrance." (HSCA--V7:254) Continuing his disavowal of the image, Humes later told the forensic panel, "Because I submit to you that, despite the fact that this upper point (the higher wound in the photograph of the back of the skull) that has been the source of some discussion here this afternoon is excessively obvious in the color photograph, I almost defy you to find it in

that magnification in the black and white...." (HSCA--V7:260-261) Independently, Finck emphatically agreed on this very point in a separate only recently released HSCA interview. Purdy asked Finck, "Do you remember anything that would correspond to that red spot (the same high 'wound' in the color photograph of the rear of JFK's head that Humes believed not to be a wound at all)?" Finck answered, "No. No, there was only one wound of entry in the back of the head (which was low in JFK's skull)." (Finck's HSCA interview, p. 94.)

While Humes praised the senior autopsy photographer (of two), John Stringer, as "one of the best medical photographers in the world" (Breo DL. JAMA 267:2797), not a single acceptable image of the President's fatal wound, the skull wound, is to be found. An image of a skull wound is among the collection, but it is taken so close to the skull as to make the image virtually impossible to incontestably orient to JFK's body or head. While an image was taken of the left, uninjured side of JFK's head from a distance that allows the head and shoulders to be captured, peculiarly no comparable image is available of the right side--a view that might have shown JFK's skull wound well if the HSCA's interpretation is correct of a right antero-lateral exit wound. It seems unlikely that the autopsy photographer would have neglected to take at least a single, adequate image of the wound, if not many more than the one inadequate image we have. (There apparently were two black and white and two color images taken of the skull wound, but all four images contain virtually the identical perspective, and thus all suffer from the problem of being such 'close ups' of the wound as to be difficult to orient properly.)

The HSCA's Baden seemed to share the author's view that JFK's photographic autopsy record is poor. He said, "Proper photographs were not taken." (539), and, "...certain things didn't happen...(such as) the kinds of documentation, pictures, measurements, that the forensic pathologist does automatically..." (HSCA-1:310-311) (emphasis added) It seems extraordinary that the United States apparently did no better for its slain President than what would have failed to pass muster for a common murder autopsy in a county hospital. The problems with the photographs do not end there however.

Finck recalled, in a 2/1/65 letter to his superior, General Joe Blumberg, that he "help(ed) the Navy photographer to take photographs of the occipital wound (external and internal aspects)..." (From Personal notes used for test sent with letter of February 1, 1965 to Brig. Gen. Blumberg by Finck. HSCA rec # 180-10081-10347, agency file # 006165, p. 8. See also the final Blumberg memo which states the same.) Oddly, the extant collection reveals no image that clearly fits Finck's description. Some Warren loyalists, however, have argued that the extant images do include those Finck recalled having taken: a photograph of the rear of JFK's head showing only scalp and no bone, the so called "F-3" image, is, thus, allegedly Finck's 'external aspect' image of the occipital wound. The image of the interior of the skull, the so called "F-8" photograph is, correspondingly, the 'internal aspect' of the occipital bone wound. The F-8 image depicts a large skull defect in the foreground, and, seemingly incidentally, some uncertain object in the background which, only if the image was taken from the front aiming the camera backward into empty skull, might depict the occipital wound's internal aspect.

Author (Aguilar), who has seen the original images in the National Archives, is unpersuaded F-3 and F-8 are the images Finck recalled having taken. Finck himself did not believe F-3 and F-8 were the images in question. After he saw all the photographs, including F-3 and F-8, with Humes and Boswell on 1-20-67, Finck wrote, "I saw no photos of bone of entry; I thought we had photographed the outside and inside of entry wound in skull." On the same page Finck catalogued some of the images he saw as, "Entry, back", "Entry, back of head (scalp)" (sic), "Exit, head (scalp)" (sic), and "Exit, head (bone)" (sic). Finck was clearly describing images F-3 and F-8 while also claiming that he did not see the images of the occipital wound whose photography he had supervised. (This memo referred to a visit to the "Archives of the US" with Humes and Boswell on January 20, 1967. The memo was typed in Brussels on Sunday, February 26, 1978 "from hand-written notes of 1967.") (HSCA document. RG #233, 2nd page.)

Finck's belief that the images he took of the occipital wound, internal and external aspects, were absent when he later examined the photographs was also made clear in his HSCA testimony, which was released in 1993. Finck claimed, "I remember positively that a Navy photographer took pictures and I wanted pictures of the crater in particular because this is a positive finding for a wound of entry in the back of the head. So I wanted a picture showing no crater from the outside and a clearcut crater from the inside, but I don't know..."(Finck's HSCA testimony, p. 85.) To clarify the point, HSCA counsel, Andy Purdy said, "...We have here a black and white blowup of that same spot. You previously mentioned that your attempt here was to photograph the crater, I think was the word that you used." Finck answered, "In the bone, not in the scalp, because to determine the direction of the projectile the bone is a very good source of information so I emphasize the photographs of the crater seen from inside the skull. What you are showing me is soft tissue wound in the scalp." (Finck's HSCA testimony, p 88.)

To further clarify that by "occipital wound" Finck meant an image of skull bone, Dr. Charles Petty asked, "If I understand you correctly, Dr. Finck, you wanted particularly to have a photograph made of the external aspect of the skull from the back to show that there was no cratering to the outside of the skull." Finck answered, "Absolutely." Petty followed with, "Did you ever see such a photograph?" Finck, "I don't think so and I brought with me memorandum referring to the examination of photographs in 1967 when I was recalled from Vietnam. I was asked to look at photographs and as I recall there were two blank 4 by 5 transparencies; in other words, two photographs that had been exposed but with no image and as I can recall I never saw pictures of the outer aspect of the wound of entry in the back of the head and inner aspect in the skull in order to show a crater although I was there asking for these photographs. I don't remember seeing those photographs." (HSCA p.90) Thus Finck himself did not believe the F-3 photograph of the rear of the head showed the bone wound entrance he recalled having photographed--it failed to show any bone at all. The F-8 image also was not the image Finck believed he had taken showing beveling of the internal aspect of the skull bone. In fact, none of the pathologists believed the extant images clearly showed the entrance wound they had found.

After reviewing the photographs on 1/20/67, Humes, Boswell and Finck signed an affidavit on 1/26/67 in which they noted that the extant photographs did not clearly reveal the skull wound they had seen at autopsy. Their report states, "From the photographs (of the back of JFK's head)

this (an object in JFK's skull) is not recognizable as a penetrating wound because of the slanting direction of entry. However, as we pointed out in the autopsy report, there was in the underlying bone a corresponding wound through the skull which exhibited beveling of the margins of the bone when viewed from the inner aspect of the skull. This is characteristic of a wound of entry in the skull." (Get ref. from Weisberg.) Under oath, Finck insisted, as had Humes, that when he examined the actual skull he did not notice anything that corresponded to the higher "red spot", the 'cowlick wound', which the HSCA believed to be the true entrance wound in JFK's skull. (Finck's HSCA testimony, p.94.) Besides the 'occipital wound' image that appears to be missing, there is evidence that there are other images missing.

John Stringer, the chief autopsy photographer, was interviewed for the HSCA by Andy Purdy. Purdy claimed that in the interview, "STRINGER (sic) said it was his recollection that all the photographs he had taken were *not* present in 1966 (when he first saw the photographs). He noted that the receipt he had said some of the film holders (sic) had no film in one side of the cassettes. He said the receipt said this happened in two or three of the film holders where one side only was allegedly loaded. He said he could understand it if the film holders were reported to have poorly exposed or defective film but could not believe that there were any sides on the film holders which were not loaded with film... STRINGER (sic) also said that he thought he had taken some interior photographs of the Presidents's chest ("I believe so") (sic). He said he was present in the room where the autopsy was conducted between approximately 6:00 and 6:30 P. M. on the night of the 22nd and 3:00 to 3:30 A.M. on the morning of the 23rd....STRINGER remembers taking 'at least two exposures of the body cavity'" (HSCA rec # 180-10093-10429. Agency file # 002070, p. 11.)

Stringer was not alone in recalling that photographs were taken of the interior of the chest. A document first released in 1993 revealed Humes told the HSCA that he "specifically recall(ed) photographs)...were taken of the President's chest, one of which showed a relatively significant part of the tract of the first missile...(these photographs) do not exist." (HSCA record # 180-10093-10429), Agency file # 002070, p. 17.) In a recently released 8/17/77 interview with Boswell, HSCA's Purdy noted "...he (Boswell) thought they photographed '...the exposed thoracic cavity and lung...' but doesn't remember ever seeing those photographs." (HSCA rec# 180-10093-10430. Agency file # 002071, p. 6) Finally, Floyd Reibe, Stringer's assistant told author David Lifton that "he thought he took about six pictures--I thing it was three film packs'-of internal portions of the body." (Lifton, D. p.638) While Reibe does not specifically state that the photographs were taken of the interior of the chest, as that was the area of interest in the 'internal portion' of JFK's body, it is reasonable to assume that these mutually recalled, though absent images are those Reibe described. Nevertheless, there are no images of any 'internal portions of JFK's body', whether of the chest or any other area.

In a recently released HSCA interview with autopsy witness, Robert F. Karnai, MD, Jim Kelly and Andy Purdy reported, "He (Karnai) recalls them putting the probe in and taking pictures (the body was on the side at the time) (sic)." (HSCA, JFK Collection. RG #233, file #002198, p.5.) There is no photograph of JFK's body on its side and there is no photograph with a probe in the body. Karnai's description, however, suggests positioning to capture the absent image

Humes, Boswell, Stringer and Reibe also recalled having taken of the interior of the chest. Thus, both autopsy photographers, Stringer and Reibe, all of JFK's pathologists and Robert F. Karnai, MD recalled the taking of photographs that do not now exist. What should one trust--the photographs we have, or the mutually corroborating recollections of the prosecutors, another physician-witness and the photographers - that the photographic record is at least incomplete, if not also altered?

In summary, the photographs of the inside and outside of the skull bone showing the characteristics of an entrance wound, which Finck claimed in JAMA and elsewhere to have personally supervised, are nowhere to be found. The images taken of the interior of JFK's body, whose taking was recalled by Humes, Boswell, Karnai, Stringer and Reibe apparently do not now exist. The defect in the right rear of the skull agreed upon by 44 of 46 witnesses at Parkland and Bethesda, including autopsy photographer, Stringer, and mortician, Robinson, (see last chapter) is simply absent in the image we have of the rear of the head. In fact, the image of the right-rear aspect of the head reveals no defect behind the right ear at all, except for the controversial red spot at the top-rear of the skull which Humes, Boswell and Finck denied before the HSCA was any wound at all. The apparent defect that is visible seems to start at a position parallel with the right ear and extend forward.

It is the myriad photographic failings and inconsistencies, and many others, that persuade some that the photograph record has been tampered with, as has other evidence been tampered with in the JFK case. One cannot blithely dismiss the forceful opinion of autopsy photographer, Floyd Reibe, who believes JFK's autopsy photographs have been forged. Of the extant images that show JFK's rear skull and scalp to be intact, Reibe said, "They're wrong. I don't know what this is, but that ain't the way it was. He didn't have a back of the head." (Livingstone, Harrison. Killing the Truth. New York, Carroll and Graf, 1993, p.169) The argument that the photographs have been "authenticated", as claimed by the HSCA's forensic panel, is unpersuasive. The absence of facial features precludes a photograph of the rear of 'JFK's' head being authenticated. And even if some of the extant images are 'authentically' of JFK, if Humes, Boswell, Finck, Karnai, Stringer and Reibe are to be trusted, it appears some images that were taken on the night of the autopsy are now absent.

If, however, the available photographic autopsy data is complete and reliable, an ironic consistency to the Bethesda proceedings seems inescapable: those nationally-respected, medical and photographic authorities selected by the American government to complete the most important autopsy in the nation's history all proved to be woefully inadequate to the task, and to have embarrassingly poor memories.

Breo is certainly right that critics have taken aim at the photographic record of JFK's autopsy, but not because critics claim it does not exist, but because of the peculiarly inadequate record that does. On this issue Breo seems to have missed yet another opportunity to offer a real contribution - by not knowing what important questions to ask JFK's pathologists and by worthlessly demolishing a straw man myth - that autopsy photographs do not exist.

Best personal wishes,

Gary



PS What is in your next book? I understand that Norman Mailer is coming out with an 'Oswald did it' book. But John Newman and David Lifton are coming out with 'we know Oswald better than Mailer, and Oswald didn't do it, and besides Oswald was definitely intelligence-connected even if he did' books. Will be interesting.

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